

## SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

lasted from March to October; but the devastation was on a less dreadful scale than among the Sienese ; out of a population of 60,000, some 7,000 Florentines perished, and, although we have not the exact figures, the mortality in Siena was evidently much greater.<sup>1</sup>

Two of Catherine's brothers, Bartolommeo, who had accompanied her back from Florence, and Stefano, who had gone to Rome, her sister Lisa, and eight of her nephews and nieces, Lapa's grandchildren, died. With her own hands Catherine prepared the bodies for burial, saying over each : " This one, at least, I shall not lose." With her companions, she passed through the streets of the city, seeking out the most infected districts, entering the houses and the hospitals, tending the stricken, comforting and converting the dying, laying out the dead—many of whom she is said to have buried with her own hands. Not a few—including the hermit, Fra Santi, and the devoted rector of the Casa della Misericordia, Messer Matteo Cenni—gained such strength from her ministrations that they rose up healed at her word, and followed her to render service to the others.

Foremost among her fellow-labourers was the noble and holy Dominican friar who now became her spiritual director, and afterwards her biographer : Fra Raimondo delle Vigne of Capua ; he whom, in her last letter, she was to call<sup><f</sup> father and son given me by that sweet Mother Mary." A man of aristocratic birth and great learning (among whose ancestors was that ill-fated Piero delle Vigne, the chancellor of the Emperor Frederick II, whose fame Dante had so nobly vindicated in a famous canto of the *Inferno*) Raimondo had in some mysterious way—to which he vaguely refers as miraculous—been called in his youth to the Dominican order, and had rapidly become a personage of importance among the friars. He had been prior of the Minerva at Rome in 1367, and shortly after (it being the practice of the

<sup>1</sup> Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, *Istoria Fiorentina*, Lib. IX. rubr. 745, who gives the Florentine mortality, says that Florence suffered less in proportion to its inhabitants than any other town in Tuscauy, and that elsewhere a third of the population died.